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Statement submitted by Palestinian Return Centre, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

The Palestinian Return Centre has been dedicated for the past 20 years to the promotion and protection of the human rights of Palestinian refugees. We urge the international community not to forget the centrality of the refugee question that is key to bringing justice to the Palestinian people and is vital for achieving the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda.

We would like to draw your attention to the Palestinian refugee problem, which remains unresolved as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) is still responsible for providing assistance and protection to over 5 million displaced Palestinians throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

In recent years, the vulnerability and isolation of Palestinian refugees has intensified, and broader gains in social and economic development across the region are very much at risk. In addition, the Sustainable Development Goals recently adopted by the international community were an aspiration beyond the foreseeable horizon of Palestinian refugees as long as they remained casualties of the unresolved conflict that had violated their fundamental human rights for more than six decades.

The 2015 Report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) confirmed that they contributed to reducing poverty, empowering women and girls and improving health and well-being. However, in many countries economic growth was not sufficiently inclusive or equitable to reach the poorest. Conflicts remain the biggest threat to human development, with fragile and conflict-affected countries typically experiencing the highest poverty rates and levels of extreme deprivation. This is the case for millions of Palestinians living in refugee camps who are suffering from extreme poverty, inadequate housing conditions and high food insecurity.

Therefore, the resilience of communities hosting refugees, particularly in developing countries, should be strengthened. This first year of the agenda is pivotal for charting the path towards sustainable development for the next 15 years. The protracted condition that the majority of Palestinian refugees find themselves in is a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. This needs to be addressed in order for sustainable development to help these communities escape deprivation and poverty.